



# Dance Ed Goes Digital

A dance teacher and a tech guru bring social media into dance education. BY MICHELLE VELLUCCI

Last winter, when New York City elementary school dance teacher Kathleen Isaac wanted to create a video submission for a dance contest, she asked one of her fifth-grade students for help. After shooting the video, he uploaded it onto Isaac's computer, put it into iMovie, titled it and posted it online—all in about three minutes.

Amazed by the student's skill, Isaac realized that her dance curriculum was lacking a key element: technology. "I felt like I wasn't keeping up with my students," she says.

Enter Doug Fox, a technology expert who helps dancers create websites and marketing campaigns using sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Together, Fox and Isaac created Kids Make Dance, a program that uses digital technologies and social media to support and enhance dance education. The goal is to incorporate up-to-the-minute technology, something kids already use and enjoy, to get them excited about dance and inspire new depths of creativity.

"We're exploring ways to create new types of dance educational pro-

grams with a focus on kid-centered dancemaking and creativity, and also integrate technology into that mix so that kids are empowered in new ways," explains Fox.

Last July, Isaac and Fox tested their model with a pilot program called Kids Make Hip Hop. Thirteen children ages 6 to 17 spent a week learning hip-hop technique and history and used that to expand their own creativity. They documented the process on camera and shared their work online.

And that's just the beginning. Fox and Isaac designed Kids Make Dance to be a multifaceted program that can be applied to any genre—ballet, jazz, modern—and used in a variety of settings, including dance studios, community centers and dance companies.

But the program is solidly based in K-12 curriculum and covers standards prescribed by the New York City Department of Education *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Dance*, of which Isaac was a contributing author. In the pilot, for example, the students learned not only hip-hop technique but also its history and culture. They talked

about personal identity and adopted aliases like "Kid Prodigy" and "Butterfly," which they painted on a graffiti wall that later formed the backdrop of their videos. They also wrote and performed their own raps in a poetry slam.

"To me, it's always important in a child-centered program that kids' personal histories get drawn in, but especially so in this genre, because hip hop is such a big expression of self," Isaac says. "You bring your own culture and characteristics into whatever you do, from the graffiti to how you dress."

The students recorded everything, from daily warm-ups to interviews with guest instructor Carlos Cordova of Souljerz Crew. "Dance, more than any other educational program, benefits from video," Fox says. "After the kids worked on an exercise we would show the video of it and it gave everybody an opportunity to say, 'What can we work on?'" (The program's extensive use of cameras also provides teachers with plenty of ways to assess and document student progress and learning.)

"What's great about technology is it

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changes the dynamics of how kids go about learning,” Fox says. “Once kids realize that they’re being videotaped, they have to speak clearly and make sure they perform for the camera. They thought not just about dancemaking but also about video production.”

The production process was as easy as plugging Flip cameras (which are designed to make video sharing simple) into a computer to upload the video, doing some quick editing in iMovie, then posting the finished product on YouTube, where Kids Make Hip Hop has its own channel. From there, the video was embedded directly into the Kids Make Hip Hop website ([www.kidsmakehiphop.com](http://www.kidsmakehiphop.com)).

For classrooms already equipped with a computer, the cost of implementing Kids Make Dance is relatively low. Digital cameras retail for as little as \$50, while Flip video camcorders start at \$150. And creating a website doesn’t have to cost a dime—open-source sites such as WordPress don’t require licensing fees and are easy to use.

Thanks to this technology, the Kids Make Hip Hop students were able to show their work to family and friends—and the global internet community. (Isaac obtained parental permission to post the material but it’s also possible to create websites that limit viewer access.) Two of the students have an aunt in Ecuador who was thrilled to be able to watch her niece and nephew online.



**DID YOU KNOW?** You and your students can share dance videos and win contests at [www.dancemedia.com](http://www.dancemedia.com)

The directive to share dance experiences is one of the standards included in the *Blueprint*, says Jody Gottfried Arnhold, founding director of the 92nd Street Y Dance Education Laboratory in Manhattan, where Isaac and Fox will offer a workshop this summer. “And this is such a beautiful example of how to do that.” **DT**

*Michelle Vellucci is a former senior editor of Dance Teacher.*